

RESTORATIVE CIRCLES

Learning Circles

TIME REQUIRED

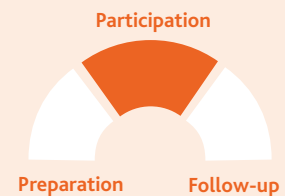
30 minutes per session

FORMAT

Small groups, whole-group discussion

OBJECTIVES

- To explore and deepen understanding of the Learning Circle.
- To explore strategies for using Learning Circles effectively in the classroom.

PROCESS PHASE COVERED**COMMENT: USING LEARNING CIRCLES**

Learning Circles are a structured process for gathering, collating, and sharing information. They can be used for beginning new topics and for providing feedback on learning outcomes and achievement. They are appropriate for a wide range of groups and occasions, including staff meetings, parent information evenings, and sessions for sports teams and cultural groups.

Learning Circles provide opportunities for individual leadership as well as collective responsibility and experience. They can be used for a broad range of learning outcomes, as they scaffold the learning for the whole group through collaboration and dynamic activities. They provide opportunities for sharing prior knowledge and peer expertise that are often missing in more traditional learning approaches.

Learning Circles are particularly useful for project-based work in which achievement and successful learning are the responsibility of the participants in each group. In the activity below, Session 1 provides an initial experience of a Project-based Learning Circle. Staff can then choose to extend the experience by continuing with the project over several days or weeks using Sessions 2 and 3.

ACTIVITY**Session 1: Small groups**

In groups of 3–5, use the resource sheet **Project – Reducing Litter in the School Grounds**. To begin the circle, use a talking piece to explore individual participants' understanding and thoughts about the topic, using some of the suggested prompts.

Then agree on a facilitator and someone to record key questions and ideas, and discuss your group's initial approach to the project, drawing on participants' thinking in the previous discussion. Use the suggested prompts to guide your planning and decision

making for collecting data on the topic, considering a wide range of options – for example, surveys, questionnaires, interviewing student or community groups, photographing trouble areas, and bringing in a guest speaker from the local community (for example, a local Green Party MP).

Once you have decided on the ways in which you will collect data, discuss the time required for each of them, and assign each member of the group responsibility for one or more of them.

Finally, consider the questions at the bottom of the resource sheet, and record the main points from your discussion for sharing with the whole group.

Session 1: Whole-group discussion

After each group has presented their main points, identify common themes and responses and record them on large sheets of paper. It will be particularly useful to note the comments from groups with members who have previous experience of Learning Circles. Others may wish to arrange a time with these individuals to observe how they facilitate this type of circle in their classroom.

Session 2

In the next session, each small group reviews their data and how they will present it to the whole group. They also spend time identifying the key tasks, in the light of their data, that will meet the aim of the project – to reduce litter in the school grounds.

Each group then feeds their findings from data collection and their identified key tasks into the whole group, opening up the dialogue to enable comparisons between the different groups' findings and recommended tasks.

Note down the key tasks – these could include, for example, capturing student and community

voice, strategies for combating littering (such as using the school newsletter, website, and posters to improve awareness), students making a video about littering, and monitoring and evaluating the success of the project.

Assign each small group one of the key tasks. Each group then begins to dialogue and make decisions about how they might approach their task, who will be responsible for different aspects of it, what resources they will need, and how to make the best use of the time allowed to complete the task.

Session 3

Allow as much time as required for the groups to complete their tasks, and then regather for Session 3. In this session, each small group presents their finished task to the whole group, and the group as a whole discusses how successful the project has been. It may also make decisions about presenting the outcomes to the school community (for example, at assemblies and online), ongoing monitoring and evaluation, and how to sustain the reduction in litter in the future.

This resource sheet is for Session 1 of Module 3.

PROJECT TOPIC: REDUCING LITTER IN THE SCHOOL GROUNDS

Use a talking piece to explore individual participants' understanding and thoughts about the topic, using some of the following prompts:

- What I already understand about littering is ...
- My experience of working in an environment where littering is an issue is ...
- The thing that most concerns me about littering is...
- What I find most challenging in combating the littering problem is ...
- Some ways to strengthen awareness of littering in the school grounds are ...
- Some ways in which littering connects with the key values of the school are ...
- What I enjoy about our school environment is ... What I don't enjoy is ...

Then decide on your group's initial approach to the project, using the following prompts to guide your decisions:

- Who will lead our group?
- What are some approaches for collecting data to inform our project?
- How much time does each approach require?
- Who will be responsible for each approach?
- What does each group member therefore need to bring to the next session?

Finally, consider the following questions:

- Have you previously used or been involved in a Learning Circle in a classroom?
- At what stage of introducing a new topic to a class or group could a Learning Circle be useful?
- What learning outcomes would this type of circle promote in your classroom?
- What are (or might be) some barriers or risks in using a Learning Circle?

Record the main points from your discussion for sharing with the whole group.